

California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment
Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Management Plan
and Draft Environmental Impact Statement
for the Coachella Valley, California

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is a federal agency responsible for managing the public lands in accordance with federal law, regulation and policy in order to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), BLM's organic act, directs the BLM to prepare land use plans which provide guidance, with public input, on how the public lands are to be managed. All subsequent activities on the BLM-managed public lands must be in conformance with the approved land use plan. The *California Desert Conservation Area Plan* (CDCA Plan, 1980, as amended) provides land use plan guidance for the entire California Desert Conservation Area. The CDCA Plan has undergone numerous minor amendments over the past 20 years, and is currently undergoing major amendments, divided into five eco-regions/planning areas: 1) the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert planning area, 2) the Northern and Eastern Mojave Desert planning area, 3) the West Mojave Desert planning area, 4) the Coachella Valley planning area and 5) the Imperial Sand Dunes planning area.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages approximately 28 percent (330,516 acres) of the total federal and non-federal land base in the Coachella Valley planning area (1,195,057 acres). The Coachella Valley planning area (Figure 1-2) is located approximately 100 miles east of Los Angeles in central Riverside County, plus a small portion in San Bernardino County.

A. Purpose and Need

The BLM in the Coachella Valley planning area has a need:

- 1) to provide for multiple use and sustainable development of the public lands while making progress towards healthy, properly functioning ecosystems;
- 2) to provide for the recovery of federal and state listed species;
- 3) to avoid future listings of sensitive species;
- 4) to provide recreational opportunities on the public lands;
- 5) to make available mineral and energy resources on the public lands;
- 6) to work collaboratively with the local jurisdictions to facilitate land management consistency, management effectiveness and cost-efficiency across jurisdictional boundaries.

The purpose of this plan amendment is to develop a general plan of action (in accordance with Title 43 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 1610) for the BLM-managed public lands that will meet the aforementioned needs while at the same time:

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- 1) Shall minimize resource use conflicts;
- 2) Shall not unduly burden Bureau resources and funding capability, including maintenance activities;
- 3) Shall include actions which are manageable and implementable relative to the urban/wildland interface and the public/private interface;
- 4) Shall be conducted in coordination with the members of the public, local jurisdictions, State and other Federal agencies to garner the public support needed to effectively implement the plan.

The BLM has a need in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains to 1) provide for the recovery of federal and state listed species, 2) to avoid future listings of sensitive species, 3) to provide recreational opportunities on the public lands, and 4) to work collaboratively with the local jurisdictions to facilitate land management consistency, management effectiveness and cost-efficiency across jurisdictional boundaries. The purpose of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains trails management plan is to develop a management strategy which provides year-round hiking, biking and equestrian use opportunities on the public lands while promoting recovery of the Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep. This strategy must also meet the aforementioned purpose statements identified for the Coachella Valley California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment.

B. Relationship to Other Plans

BLM planning regulations at 43 CFR 1610.3-2 require BLM planning documents to be consistent with officially approved resource-related plans, policies and programs of other Federal, State and local government agencies, and Indian Tribes, to the extent legally feasible under Federal laws and regulations. The Coachella Valley California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment is being developed in concert with several planning efforts relevant to the Coachella Valley. These plans and their relationship to this plan amendment are summarized below:

The Coachella Valley Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan/ Natural Communities Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP). The Coachella Valley CDCA plan amendment was developed in tandem with the CVMSHCP to provide the framework for those implementation actions which will support landscape-level conservation and provide for community needs. The CVMSHCP will include a combined Environmental Impact Review (EIR), as required by the California Environmental Quality Act, and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Management Plan is an element of and would be incorporated into the CVMSHCP. Upon completion of the CVMSHCP, the BLM proposes to adopt management measures in support of this plan as an activity (implementation) level plan for public lands within the planning area. The activity plan would be tiered to BLM's Coachella Valley California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment.

Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Management Plan. In October of 2000, the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 created a 272,000 acre national monument on BLM and Forest Service managed land. The Act requires development of a management plan by Fall of 2003. This National Monument is entirely within the Coachella Valley planning boundary. BLM's Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment decisions affecting the National Monument would be brought forward into the management plan, as will US Forest Service plan revision decisions affecting the National Monument.

The Recovery Plan for the Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep. Recovery plans, developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), identify actions needed to reverse the decline of a threatened or endangered species. Such actions frequently require coordination among Federal, State, and local agencies, academic researchers, conservation organizations, private individuals, and major land users in order to be successful. However, the development and approval phases of recovery plans are excluded from National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requirements because they are advisory in nature.

The Peninsular Ranges population of bighorn sheep (PRBS; *Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) was listed as endangered in 1998. In October of 2000, the USFWS completed the *Peninsular Ranges Bighorn Sheep Recovery Plan* which recommends actions to recover and protect this listed species. In February 2001, USFWS designated critical habitat for the PRBS. Bureau of Land Management employees were consulted during preparation of the recovery plan. The recovery plan makes recommendations which are directly applicable and addressed in this CDCA plan amendment.

Through the CVMSHCP, Trails Management Plan and CDCA Plan amendment, the BLM is considering a range of alternatives, each composed of a suite of actions and guided by the Recovery Plan recommendations. The alternatives include habitat improvements (tamarisk control, water sources, etc.), land exchanges, land acquisitions, trails management, and limits to other activities. Altogether, the decisions regarding these actions will compose the strategy to be implemented on BLM-managed public lands in order to contribute to bighorn sheep population recovery. By means of these planning efforts, the alternative strategies for public lands are analyzed by an interdisciplinary team and with the benefit of public input and comment in accordance with NEPA, as well as plan-level consultation with the USFWS.

Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Land Management Plan. The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians is developing a Tribal Habitat Conservation Plan for the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation. The purposes of this plan are to balance environmental protection and economic development objectives for the Reservation and to simplify compliance with the Endangered Species Act. BLM-managed public lands adjoin Tribal lands in a number of locations throughout the Valley. BLM's CDCA plan amendment was developed in coordination with the Tribal Habitat Conservation Plan in order to facilitate consistency in land uses and habitat protection across the Coachella Valley. Furthermore, the Tribe and the BLM operate under a Cooperative Management Agreement and actively seek to find ways to engage in activities that improve land management compatibility, effectiveness and efficiency.

Santa Rosa Mountains Wildlife Habitat Management Plan: A Sikes Act Project (Sikes Act Plan): This plan was jointly prepared and approved by BLM and the State of California Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game in 1980. It described shared wildlife and habitat management objectives, as well as actions to implement those objectives. The plan includes information that is no longer current, decisions that have already been implemented, decisions which no longer fit current conditions, and decisions which are still relevant. The CVMSHCP and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Management Plan (an activity plan) would update and amend the Sikes Act Plan.

Draft 2002 Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan Due to exceedances of the 24-hour and annual average PM10 standards, U.S. EPA classified Coachella Valley as a serious PM10 non-attainment area. In cooperation with the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, local jurisdictions, government agencies (including BLM), developers/builders, farmers, other stakeholders and the public, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) staff prepared the draft 2002 Coachella Valley PM10 State Implementation Plan (2002 SIP). The purpose of the 2002 SIP is to develop an enhanced PM10 reduction program that demonstrates attainment with the PM10 standards by the earliest practicable date, and to provide the necessary supporting documentation to formally request an extension of the PM10 attainment date. In response to the 2002 SIP, the BLM has incorporated an air quality management strategy in this Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment, in an effort to reduce PM10 emissions from the public lands.

General Plans and Management Plans prepared by Local Jurisdictions, Native American Tribes, and State Agencies. The BLM shall coordinate with the local jurisdictions, Native American Tribes and State Agencies to facilitate consistency with plans prepared by these entities, to the legal extent feasible under Federal law, regulation and policy.

The Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert (NECO) Plan. BLM's Draft NECO Plan provides alternative scenarios for a comprehensive framework for managing species and habitats, including recovery of the desert tortoise, on Federal lands managed by the BLM, National Park Service (Joshua Tree National Park), and the U.S. Marine Corps (Chocolate Mountains Aerial Gunnery Range) in eastern San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial Counties. The western edge of the NECO plan overlaps the CVMSHCP planning area by about 55,000 acres, all in Riverside County. The proposed NECO plan and final environmental impact statement is scheduled for completion Summer of 2002. Even though the respective planning leads have been coordinating to facilitate consistency in the overlap area, some NECO Plan decisions may require amending in order to complete the CVMSHCP.

The West Mojave Desert Plan. The West Mojave Plan is being jointly prepared by local jurisdictions, the Department of Defense and BLM, and encompasses 9.4 million-acres in most of California's western Mojave Desert. Approximately two square miles of the West Mojave planning boundary overlaps with the Coachella Valley planning boundary, all within San Bernardino County. The draft plan is currently under preparation and scheduled for public release late in 2002. The BLM planning team leads for the West Mojave and Coachella Valley plan are working together to ensure consistency between the two plans in the overlap area.

C. Planning Criteria

Coachella Valley California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment. Planning criteria are "sideboards" which guide development of the California Desert Conservation Area Plan amendment, to ensure it is tailored to the issues and to avoid unnecessary data collection and analyses. In addition to the standard suite of Federal laws, regulations, Executive Orders, Manual guidance and Bureau policies which guide all BLM planning and environmental review documents, the following criteria were specifically established to guide development of the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley:

- 1) This CDCA Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley shall be completed by December 31, 2002.
- 2) As this Coachella Valley planning effort is an amendment to and not a revision of the CDCA Plan (1980, as amended), any CDCA plan elements not addressed nor specifically changed in this plan amendment shall remain extant and in effect.
- 3) The planning boundary for the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert (NECO) Plan overlaps the eastern portion of the Coachella Valley planning boundary. BLM staff working on the Coachella Valley plan amendment shall coordinate with staff working on the NECO Plan to ensure consistency between the two plans.
- 4) The planning boundary for the West Mojave Plan overlaps the northwest portion of the Coachella Valley planning boundary. BLM staff working on the Coachella Valley plan amendment shall coordinate with staff working on the West Mojave Plan to ensure consistency between the two plans.
- 5) Any proposals promulgated through this Coachella Valley planning effort shall be in compliance with the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000.

Relationship to the Center for Biological Diversity, et al. Lawsuit (Case No. C-00-0927 WHA. U.S. District Court, Northern District of California, San Francisco Division).

The December 31, 2002 due date is related to the following lawsuit stipulations. 1) Paragraph 5 of *Stipulation and Proposed Order to Amend Prior Stipulations*, approved by U.S. District Court on January 31, 2002, amends the All Further Injunctive Relief Stipulation to require that "BLM will issue a Record of Decision regarding route designation in NECO, NEMO desert tortoise Desert Wildlife Management Areas [DWMAs], and the Coachella Valley by December 31, 2002." 2) Paragraph 15 amends the Bighorn Sheep Stipulation. This provision reads in part: "If the BLM Record of Decision for the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Amendment (CVMSHCP) is not signed by December 31, 2002, BLM will close to vehicles and effectively block by January 1, 2003 all known routes providing unauthorized vehicle access onto the Dunn Road. In the interim, until a BLM Record of Decision for the plan is signed, BLM will, by April 1, 2002, install and maintain signs on all known roads providing access to the Dunn Road that indicate that access to the Dunn Road is prohibited."

In order to integrate route designation into the overall land management program, thereby providing meaningful public participation, the route designation process must proceed with the plan amendment, and both must be completed by December 31, 2002. Route designation has always been part of the larger BLM plan amendment process, based on the public notice of June 28, 2000, public scoping meetings in July of 2000, and the April 12, 2002 notice addendum describing proposals, alternatives and issues being addressed. To treat route designation separately would require re-initiation of public scoping and the public process relative to the routes. The relationship of route designation to landscape level land management would be lost

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if the full plan amendment was not completed. For these reasons, route designation remains part of the larger BLM plan amendment process.

Absent the lawsuit requirements, the schedule for public review and decision making might have been delayed slightly in order to track very closely with the timing of the non-federal portion of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan / Natural Communities Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP). The BLM has been working closely with the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy and the local jurisdictions since 1996 to develop this Draft CDCA Plan Amendment in tandem with the Coachella Valley Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan, including coordination of alternatives in areas with intermingled or adjacent jurisdictions. The Coachella Valley CDCA plan amendment provides the framework to support the landscape-level approach to conservation and providing for community needs. Upon completion of the CVMSHCP, the BLM proposes to adopt the CVMSHCP as an activity (implementation) level plan, tiered to BLM's Coachella Valley CDCA plan amendment.

Trails Management Plan Guidance. The Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Management Plan is being prepared under separate regulatory authority than the CDCA Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley. This trails management plan is an element of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Area Plan (CVMSHCP), and is an activity level (also known as implementation level) plan prepared in accordance with BLM Manual 8322 and is not subject to the 43 CFR 1610 planning regulations. A Record of Decision for the trails management plan will not be issued until completion of the CVMSHCP. At such time, the BLM portion of the approved trails management plan may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.4. The trails management plan must be in conformance with and is tiered to the Coachella Valley CDCA plan amendment under Chapter 2, the section addressing "Hiking, Biking & Equestrian Trails."

ALTERNATIVES

A. Coachella Valley California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment

General Description of each Alternative. Alternatives A through C represent an array of options for each plan element, ranging from less restrictive land use (A) to more restrictive (C). Alternative D is the “no action” alternative. The BLM preferred alternative consists of an amalgamation of plan elements chosen from three alternatives (A through C). The preferred alternative for each plan element is highlighted in the “Summary of Alternatives” [table ES-1](#).

As this is a plan amendment and not a revision, most of the guidance and land use plan decisions established in the *California Desert Conservation Area Plan* (1980 as amended) shall remain extant. The land use plan action alternatives identify specific proposed changes to the CDCA Plan, and are not meant to replace all decisions for a particular plan element.

Plan Goals Common to All Alternatives. The preferred alternative incorporates the following goals which are a supplement to the goals presented in the *California Desert Conservation Area Plan* (1980, as amended).

1. Ensure a balance of multiple use and sustainable public land uses with progress toward attaining healthy, properly functioning ecosystems.
2. Achieve recovery of listed species, and manage species to avoid future listings.
3. Maintain a network of motorized vehicle routes necessary to meet recreational and other needs while minimizing affects to air quality and other resource values.
4. Provide opportunities for off-highway vehicle free-play in the Coachella Valley where compliance with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act and other environmental laws will be attained.
5. Establish and maintain a network of hiking, biking and equestrian trails that provide opportunities for year-round recreation.
6. Make available public lands to support community infrastructure needs for southern California including energy production, mineral extraction and utilities, while minimizing resource use conflicts and promote species recovery in the plan area as a whole.
7. Work in collaboration with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians to manage the branded horses in the Indian Canyons effectively and efficiently.
8. Protect the free-flowing characteristics and outstandingly remarkable values of rivers that are eligible and may be suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation, and ensure their tentative classifications as “wild,” “scenic” or “recreational” are not affected.
9. Participate as a federal land management partner with the local Coachella Valley jurisdictions, and contribute to development and implementation of the Coachella Valley Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan.
10. Develop an overall strategy for managing the public lands which is adaptable over time based on the results of resource monitoring in order to effectively achieve the above goals.

Land Use Plan Alternatives. Table ES-1 presents a summary description of the various alternatives for each plan element. Please refer to the full text version of the Draft Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment and draft environmental impact statement for a complete (and therefore more accurate) description of each alternative plan element. Not all of the plan elements have 4 different alternatives. Some plan elements have only three or two alternatives. The BLM preferred alternative consists of an amalgamation of plan elements chosen from Alternatives A through C. The preferred alternative for each plan element is highlighted in Table ES-1 “Summary of Alternatives.”

Plan Maintenance. Several of these CDCA Plan Amendment alternatives are contingent upon the conservation boundary established through the CVMSHCP. Most of the CVMSHCP conservation boundary has been delineated. Areas still under discussion between the local jurisdictions, CDFG and the USFWS do not involve BLM-managed public lands, such that BLM can definitively establish management direction for the BLM-managed public lands. The BLM would use the CVMSHCP preferred alternative conservation boundary delineated as of the date of the Record of Decision for the BLM CDCA Plan Amendment. The final CVMSHCP boundary would be updated in the CDCA Plan Amendment through plan maintenance (43 CFR 1610.5-4), as uses or restrictions on the BLM-managed public lands would not change. In the event that the CVMSHCP is not completed, the land use designations established for the BLM-managed lands through this CDCA Plan Amendment would remain extant, until such time a subsequent CDCA Plan Amendment was deemed necessary.

B. Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Management Plan

Although the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Management Plan is being prepared as an element of the CVMSHCP, the BLM would like to ‘benchmark’ progress made to date through negotiations with the local jurisdictions and wildlife agencies, by including the draft trails management plan in this draft environmental impact statement. A separate Record of Decision (from that of the CDCA Plan Amendment) would be issued for the BLM portion of the trails management plan. Members of the public may appeal activity level decisions, to the Interior Board of Land Appeals in accordance with 43 CFR 4.4. The BLM preferred alternative for the trails management plan consists of Alternative B, highlighted in [Table ES-2](#). Refer to the full text version of the draft trails management plan and draft environmental impact statement for a complete (and therefore more accurate) description of each trails alternative.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A summary of the anticipated impacts of each of the alternatives for the Coachella Valley CDCA Plan and the trails management plan is presented in tables ES-3 and ES-4 respectively. Refer to the full text of version of this document for a complete description of potential impacts.

THE COLLABORATIVE PLANNING PROCESS

Throughout this planning process, the BLM has strived to create an open planning process, such that opportunities for public input are not be limited to the minimum requirements set by the BLM planning regulations and National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). This planning process has also been deliberately designed to engage and involve local government, state agencies, other federal agencies, and Indian tribes to a very high level.

The Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment and trails management plan are being developed in partnership with the local jurisdictions, State and Federal agencies, and private interests, in tandem with the multi-jurisdictional Coachella Valley Multi-Species Habitat Conservation

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Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP). There have been numerous public meetings since 1996, held jointly with the CVMSHCP, to discuss development of the Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment and trails management plan. Policy Action Group meetings are being conducted monthly as part of the joint CDCA Plan Amendment/CVMSHCP planning effort. The Policy Action Group meetings are regularly attended by representatives of local jurisdictions, Native American Tribes, State and Federal government agencies, private interest groups and citizens. Numerous additional meetings and working group sessions were held to focus on issues of particular interest, such as development of a trails management plan and public input on inventories of motorized vehicle routes.

The BLM initiated government-to-government consultation with Indian Tribes by letter in November of 2000. This letter invited Native American participation and comment in the planning process. In March of 2002, as the planning document evolved and potential land management actions became more clearly defined, a second letter was sent to update tribes and to continue government-to-government consultation. Letters were sent to the following Tribes: Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Augustine Band of Mission Indians, Cabazon Band of Mission Indians, Cahuilla Band of Indians, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Los Coyotes Band of Indians, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, Ramona Band of Mission Indians, Santa Rosa Band of Mission Indians, Torres-Martinez Band of Desert Cahuilla Indians, and Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians. Follow-up discussions were conducted with representatives of the Agua Caliente, Augustine, Morongo, and Fort Mojave groups. The Bureau of Land Management also requested a record search of the sacred lands files of the Native American Heritage Commission.

BLM has been informally consulting with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game since 1996 as the Draft CDCA Plan Amendment/ EIS was being developed in coordination with the CVMSHCP Plan. Formal consultation for the Coachella Valley CDCA Plan Amendment will be initiated June, 2002.

BLM is also in consultation with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) under the 1998 State Protocol Agreement between the California State Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the California State Historic Preservation Office. An early notification and invitation to participate in identification of issues was submitted to the SHPO's office in September of 2001. BLM met with the State Historic Preservation Officer in Sacramento in February, 2002 to facilitate consensus between the agencies on the approach taken to address cultural resources under the plan amendment. During the meeting, BLM briefed the SHPO staff on the planning effort and presented a proposal for completing field inventory in support of the planning effort. This proposal was submitted formally to SHPO on March 25, 2002. BLM will submit draft and final plans to SHPO for review and comment.